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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000003

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SUBJECT: MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE: ITALIAN IMAM COMMENTS ON  
OUTREACH TO THE POPE, VATICAN INVITES MUSLIM SCHOLARS TO ROME

REF: (A) 07 VATICAN 181, (B) 07 VATICAN 180, (C) 07 VATICAN 165, (D) 07 VATICAN 151

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Charge d'affaires, EXEC,  
State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A meeting with Imam Yahya Pallavicini offered fresh perspectives on the nascent dialogue between 138 Muslim scholars and Christian leaders, including the Pope (reftels). The Pope, according to Pallavicini, was a key "target" of "A Common Word." The Holy See's recent response (reftel A) was thus welcome and important, and Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal had already drafted a response to the Pope on behalf of the other scholars (an advance copy of which was given to us). Pallavicini also emphasized the need for any dialogue to be seen as one between equals, expressed his own desire to expand the dialogue to include Judaism, and commented on the organization and interaction of the 138 signatories. Septel will report on the recent announcement that the Holy See has agreed to meet with "Common Word" representatives this spring. End summary.

Pallavicini describes the process

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¶2. (C) Charge d'affaires, PolOff, and PAO met with Imam Yahya Sergio Yahe Pallavicini on December 19, 2007. Imam Pallavicini, Vice-President of the Italian-Islamic Religious Community (Comunita Religiosa Islamica Italiana, Co.Re.Is), is an Italian citizen who was born a Muslim to an Italian father and Japanese mother. He is a member of the Italian Ministry of the Interior's Council on Islam in Italy, and is Imam of the al-Wahid Mosque of Milan. Pallavicini is a former participant in the International Visitors Leadership Program, and is fluent in English and Italian. He is the only Italian signer of "A Common Word", on which post has reported extensively (reftels).

¶3. (C) Imam Pallavicini told us that the Vatican was central to the proposed dialogue, noting that while "A Common Word" was addressed to a number of Christian leaders, the Pope was the principal "target." The 138 Muslim scholars had thus welcomed the Holy See's response (reftelQ) and, in a letter written by Prince Ghazi on behalf of the group, had accepted the Pope's proposals, including a meeting with the Pope and formation of a working group. In his letter, an advance copy of which was given to us, Prince Ghazi suggested sending three representatives to the Vatican in FebQary or March 2008 to confirm any outstanding details. (Note: septel reports on the

just-announced confirmation that the Vatican will host these representatives and that a larger meeting will occur in the spring. End note.) Prince Ghazi noted that "we, like you, also consider complete theological agreement between Christians and Muslims inherently not possible by definition, but still wish to seek and promote a common stance and cooperation based on what we do agree on." The full text of Prince Ghazi's letter is now available at [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com).

¶4. (C) Pallavicini said many Muslims doubt the sincerity of the Vatican's outreach towards Islam. Some form of progress is essential to avoid a gap between expectations and results. Pallavicini stressed that any dialogue must be respectful and seen as one between equals.

¶5. (C) Pallavicini said that he was personally in favor of expanding the scope of the dialogue to include those of the Jewish faith, but that this position had only minority support among the 138 Muslim scholars. Turning to other Christian denominations, Pallavicini said that he thought dialogue with the Orthodox Church could be particularly fruitful.

¶6. (C) Speaking of the group of 138 scholars and signatories, Pallavicini said the group had reached its maximum workable size. He noted that many now wanted to join, most from conviction, a few from expedience, but that any increase in size would leave the group too large and unwieldy to function in a workable manner. Prince Ghazi was the hub of the group, Pallavicini confirmed, but a core group of signatories remained in regular contact by email and phone.

Comment

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¶7. (C) Pallavicini is an influential member of the Italian Muslim community and his comments again underscore the importance of the interfaith dialogue effort represented by "A Common Word". We will continue to engage the Holy See on this issue and welcome reporting from other posts on the visibility of this dialogue; we would also welcome biographical information on other signers of "A Common Word" as many are likely to pass through Rome (even apart from those who will come in the spring as part of the formal delegation -- see septel).  
SANDROLINI